584 their mutual sentiments and decide in complete freedom on the principle of their future union.

Natural inclinations are rarely opposed by parents, and so it is primarily out of form and a sentiment of respect that a young man, after reaching an agreement with his fiancée, sends an old man to convey his proposal to the parents of the future bride.

[554] On the other hand, since Laotian customs establish the size of the dowry which young men must, depending on their social status, [192] deliver to their in-laws, girls eligible for marriage encourage only those suitors who are in a position to provide such a dowry (1).

(1) The sum varies, for the lower and middle classes, between ten and 250 francs. But in the families of notables it may go as high, counting jewelry and gifts, as 1200 or 1500 francs.

When an agreement has been reached the fiancée's parents give a feast to which relatives, friends, neighbors and bonzes are invited. The latter then set a day and hour for celebrating the marriage, taking care to choose a propitious day.

585 On the appointed day the groom, accompanied by his friends and by musicians, goes to the house of his future wife's parents, to whom he delivers the sum agreed on as his dowry as well as the clothes, jewels and various gifts which he may care to add. As a sign of homage he also gives his in-laws wax candles and flowers, which are often accompanied by various foods, brandy, tobacco, etc.

The marriage contract is immediately drawn up in the presence of a mandarin and notables of the region. The act gives the names of the bride and groom, as well as those of their parents and the witnesses and magistrates present. The sum of the dowry, the jewels and other objects delivered by the groom to his future bride and her parents are carefully listed. Then after the document is signed by the young couple the authorities affix their seal to it and it is given to the girl's parents (2).

[212] (2) When the bride or groom does not know how to write, his or her signature is replaced by a black or red thumbprint or by an outline of the joints of the index finger (generally of the left hand).

149; Reinach--146 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
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Then comes the feast. A suckling pig, a hen, a cock, two bowls of cooked rice, two hardboiled eggs, two small jars containing brandy, a handful of cotton threads and lighted wax candles are placed on a copper platter before a kind of altar erected in the middle of the house. In certain parts of Laos cakes and flowers take the place of these offerings, except for the rice, eggs, candles and cotton thread. These latter are obligatory, according to Laotian custom.

[193] The bride and groom kneel down before the altar, and the marriage ceremony begins. An elderly man, a sorcerer, or the man who has been the go-between in the marriage recites prayers and performs certain ritual practices. Then he attaches cotton threads to the wrists of the bride and groom so as to form bracelets. These are supposed to be "fetishes of happiness." Finally the newlyweds pour out a libation of brandy and all those present drink from the same cup after them, passing it from hand to hand.

In families of notables the bride's parents give back part of the dowry to their son-in-law after he has given it to them, as a mark of esteem and great confidence.

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If the son-in-law is to live with the bride's parents then the dowry is decreased in accordance with custom, in compensation for the labor which he will furnish to the community (1).

(1) A custom which is quite widely observed decrees that the groom shall live with his in-laws and help them with their work like a son until the time when he has a child. He is then free to go elsewhere and found a new family home. This custom is extremely ancient in origin and contributes greatly to strengthening the bonds of kinship between the groom and his in-laws.

There are cases, however, where the groom already has a house and takes his wife to live there after the marriage ceremony. The newlyweds are then accompanied by their friends. The young men take along noisy instruments with which they make a great racket, while the young women carry the bride's clothes and bedclothes to her new home.

When they reach their home a celebration takes place in which there is no shortage of brandy and during which the bride runs and shuts herself in her room so as to escape the extremely licentious remarks made by those present, who are somewhat drunk after their many libations.

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Building materials, interior arrangement and furniture in Thai houses do not differ in any significant way from what we have described in connection with the Laotians.

Births. Like the Laotian women, Thai women generally give birth to children with the greatest ease, and the ceremonies accompanying births are identical. 844

Marriages. Betrothals generally take place among the Thais after the farming work is over, in December or January, during the cold season. Sheds are built in the villages. Fires are laid there and the marriageable girls install themselves there with a spinning wheel, reel or cotton gin to keep them busy and prevent them from losing countenance. The young men come and join them and exchange declarations, compliments, betel quids and cigarettes with them. There it is that promises of marriage are made, which are followed by a request to the girl's parents when she gives her lover permission to do so. 584

A few days later, during a banquet which takes place in the girl's house, the engagement is announced and the young [236] people are then free to see one another and come and go together at all hours and in all places.

The marriage is not celebrated until several months after the betrothal unless traces of pregnancy are evident in the engaged girl, in which case the marriage takes place at once.

The ceremony is much simpler than among the Laotians, but it is followed by a series of banquets which succeed one another for several days and at which great quantities of rice brandy and rice beer are consumed. 585

The groom comes to live in his wife's room on his wedding day. He is supposed to stay in the home of his in-laws for eight years (only three years in some regions) and share in their work. 591

Adultery. Divorce. "Cases of adultery are extremely rare. When such an eventuality does occur, the man is condemned to a fine of seven bars of silver (about 260 francs) and the woman to a fine of six bars of the same metal (about 225 francs). Half of these sums is awarded to the judges and the other half to the husband, who may then either take back or repudiate his unfaithful wife. 586 684

"In the latter case, the unfaithful wife generally marries her accomplice.

"Divorce is rarer, but just as easy among the Thais as among 586

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The person whose absent spirits are to be recalled sits next to the pha khouan, on the other side of which is the achar master of ceremonies facing him.

In the case of a wedding, the bride and bridegroom each sits in front of his and her own pha khouan and achar, the young man being on the right of his affianced. [585]

Those present, consisting of aged persons, notables, relatives, friends and acquaintances, sit around mostly behind the interested parties.

While the candles are lighted, the achar commences to recite the prayer.

After the litanies are ended, the oldest and most respected of the assembly begins a series of the phouk khene (fixing a thread to the wrist) starting with the achar. The latter extends his forearm horizontally, either his right or his left, bent at right angles and held near the elbow by the hand of another person in the gathering. The opposite hand must be held in the attitude of prayer in front of the face as if it were joined to the hand on the other side. The man who will tie the knot then grasps the white cotton thread by the middle, so that the two halves hang down. These he draws over the wrist which is held in both directions of the axis of the arm, in order to sweep away the kho, that is, the misfortunes sent as a punishment for former sins. Then he detaches from the extremity of each thread a little piece which he throws towards the setting sun, thus throwing the kho afar. He then takes the khay khouan, a [51] pellet of rice, a banana, and finally one of the precious objects contained in the pha khouan. These he places in the extended open hand to serve as an offering to the khouan, and brings the small tray containing the khay khouan closer in such a way that the back of this hand is in contact with that of the chicken. Finally, after tying the thread around the wrist, he grasps the loops of the knot between the thumb and the forefinger, and rolls them together for about a second, giving him time to finish the formula of good wishes which he has been murmuring since the beginning while accomplishing the gestures described above.

The symbolical knot tied to the wrist serves to hold the khouan who have just been attracted to it, and prevents them from wandering away again. One can take advantage of the opportunity to "tie the wrist" of anyone present, either as a sign of friendship or of hommage. [576] At the close of the ceremony, which comes to an end without any more formalities, everyone is invited to a meal offered for the occasion.

173: Deydier--36 H, B-3 (no date) 1952 AM1 Indochina
(ca. 1940) Laotians AM8

## Marriage

In Laos one gets married in the even months. The favorite month 585
is the sixth, that of the feast of rockets, and the last one possible, 805
because in the eighth month the sons-in-law do not dare to interrupt the work in the fields and after that until the twelfth month the Buddhist Lent must be observed.

[56] The Marriage Proposal. Laotian tradition requires [782]
a previous request, and the obligatory giving of the Kha Khun Phi, 584
tribute paid to the guardian genii, also the optional gift of the Kha Dong, the dowery which is given by the husband to the bride or to her parents.

The boy's mother, accompanied by one or two aged female relatives, goes to the home of the young girl, and in the course of conversing asks if the girl is of age to be married. The mother is free to answer that her daughter is too young or that no young man loves her, and that she runs the risk of remaining an old maid. In this last event the answer is an acceptance. Then during further visits material questions are settled. Up until the day of marriage the two affianced ones do not exchange a single word, and besides it is not necessary for them to know each other. However, as the Laotian villages are not very big, it is probable that the young people have had the opportunity to meet several times at the boun.

The official request takes place the day before the wedding and 788
on the evening of this day, after dinner, the young man goes to 584
the home of his future bride and with her attends the prayer of the bonzes who bless the water contained in begging bowls. A white cotton cord links together the bonzes, the begging bowls and the two betrothed. The blessed water is kept throughout the night. The next day at the earliest hour the same bonzes, the relatives and friends come and sprinkle the two young people generously with this water. When they have dried themselves and changed their clothes, they make their morning offering to the bonzes who bless them once more.

The Sou Khouan. This is properly called the marriage 585
ceremony. The days and hours for the ceremony are determined by [787]
the aged hora (astrologists or soothsayers) after a minute study of the horoscopes of each one. This ceremony takes place in the home of the young girl. After a [57] family Sou Khouan celebrated at his home, the husband returns to his betrothed accompanied by two comrades who protect him with two parasols and followed by a procession of bearers.

585 In front of the bride's house, guards make a sham defence of the gate of the house. The husband and his retinue can enter only by making a gift of money or alcohol. When he reaches the stairway of the house, the young man may only climb it after having his feet washed on a piece of stone covered with a banana leaf by the sisters or the women servants of the bride. He must pay for this service, then seat himself in front of the two ritual phakhouan next to his [801] bride, who is already sitting there. The Sou Khouan of the wedding resembles the bassi. However at the wedding there are only two phakhouan and everything in the ceremony must be in even numbers. They are, however, larger and better decorated than the ordinary phakhouan. The marriage is celebrated by two individuals officiating who recite sacramental formulas in duet. Then, after tying a large number of cotton threads around their wrists, the married couple prostrate themselves before each of the aged people and those who are present. They are then led to their room by a lady chosen from among the most virtuous.

## Funerals

764 In Laos as in all Buddhist countries, the dead are burned. How-
766 ever, a distinction is made between two kinds of death, normal death and accidental (drowning, suicide or violent death). The dead of the second category must be buried within twenty-four hours. The story is told of a peasant's wife who, having died in childbirth, was quickly cut up in pieces by the villagers who scattered them to the four winds so that she would not become a wandering soul capable of tormenting the living.

764 [58] When there is a death in a house, the body is bathed with tepid water, then with cold water. It is then perfumed and dressed. Two garments are put on it, one wrong side out, the other right side out. The former symbolizes death, the latter life, for the favorite garment of the dead person while alive was chosen. His hair is then combed and he is shackled with a white cotton thread, for he must not return to the world of the living. The same thread is used to wrap around his neck, to tie his two hands together, and his two feet together. This bond must not be cut, so a knot is made at each place where it is attached. This thread also shows man how illusory are the bonds which tie him to the world. Then the body is wrapped in [823 342] a shroud. It is laid parallel with the largest dimension of the house, as opposed to the living who always lie in the direction of its width.